

## Message Text

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17

ACTION SCS-03

INFO OCT-01 NEA-09 ISO-00 SCA-01 SY-04 L-02 PPT-01 H-01

PA-01 PRS-01 USIE-00 CIAE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00 SSO-00

INRE-00 /031 W

----- 093215

O R 201057Z JAN 75

FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2425

INFO AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

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EO 11652: N/A

TAGS: CASC, SY

SUBJECT: STATUS REPORT ON DETENTION OF AP CORRESPONDENT

REF: A. DAMASCUS 197; B. DAMASCUS 206

1. SUMMARY: FOLLOWING IS CHRONOLOGY OF DETENTION AP CORRESPONDENT LUDINGTON BY SYRIAN MILITARY SECURITY AND EMBASSY EFFORTS ON HIS BEHALF. EMBASSY INFORMED BY MIN INFORMATION 1130 JAN 20 THAT LUDINGTON HAD BEEN RELEASED ABOUT ONE HOUR EARLIER. END SUMMARY.

2. DAMASCUS CHIEF OF POLICE INFORMED EMBASSY EVENING JANUARY 18 THAT LUDINGTON NOT BEING HELD IN ANY DAMASCUS JAIL. WHEN EMBASSY REQUESTED HE CHECK ALSO WITH MILITARY SECURITY AND G-2, HE DEMURRED SAYING THIS OUTSIDE HIS RESPONSIBILITY.

3. AMBASSADOR SAME EVENING PURSUED MATTER BY PHONE WITH FOREIGN MINISTRY CHIEF OF PROTOCOL AND THROUGH HIM WITH MINISTER OF INFORMATION. FORMER ASKED HIM CHECK BACK ON SUNDAY. LATTER CONFIRMED LUDINGTON UNDER INVESTIGATION BY G-2 FOR BREACH MILITARY SECURITY AND SAID HE UNDERSTOOD SUBJECT WOULD BE RELEASED LATE SUNDAY EVENING.

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4. ON JAN 19 PROTOCOL SUGGESTED EMBOFF CALL ON FOREIGN MINISTRY DIRECTOR OF INFORMATION TO DISCUSS CASE. DIRECTOR SAID LUDINGTON STILL BEING HELD BY SYRIAN AUTHORITIES BUT BEING WELL TREATED AND EXPECTED TO BE RELEASED SHORTLY, PROBABLY LATER JAN 19 OR JAN 20.

5. SYRIAN CHARGES AGAINST LUDINGTON, HE SAID, CONCERN TWO AP DESPATCHES. IN G-2 EYES MOST SERIOUS (WHICH EMBASSY HAS NOT SEEN) WAS DESPATCH REPORTING THAT DURING KING FAISAL'S VISIT TO UNIDENTIFIED SYRIAN AIRBASE JAN 16, HE INSPECTED SOVIET "MIG-25(S)" (SIC) AND SOVIET INSTRUCTORS ON BASE EXPLAINED THIER CHARACTERISTICS TO HIM. REPORT, DIRECTOR SAID, WAS UNTRUE AND HE HAD PERSONALLY CONFIRMED ITS FALSENESS FROM PROTOCOL OFFICERS WHO HAD ACCOMPANIED FAISAL. MOREOVER, IT WAS UNQUESTIONABLY EMBARRASSING TO SARG AND ITS ROYAL GUEST. IN POINT OF FACT, NO JOURNALISTS HAD BEEN PERMITTED TO ACCOMPANY FAISAL ON THIS VISIT AND FON MIN OFFICIAL DID NOT KNOW WHERE AP GOT ITS BAD INFORMATION.

6. SECOND OFFENDING AP DESPATCH WAS REPORT OF BOMB EXPLOSION JAN 16 UNDER CAR NEAR OMAYYAD HOTEL IN DAMASCUS (PUBLISHED IN BEIRUT DAILY STAR JAN 17). EVEN IF THIS DESPATCH BASED ON FACT, DIRECTOR SAID, IT HAD LINKED EXPLOSION TO FAISAL VISIT IN UNWARRANTED MANNER AND THIS ALSO HAD EMBARRASSED SARG.

7. MOREOVER, DIRECTOR SAID, LOCAL AP MAN FARES HAD TOLD AUTHORITIES HE HAD DONE EVERYTHING HE COULD TO DISSUADE LUDINGTON FROM SENDING DESPATCHES IN QUESTION, KNOWING THEY WERE OUTSIDE BOUNDS OF ACCEPTABLE PRESS REPORTING FROM SYRIA, BUT LUDINGTON HAD INSISTED ON SENDING THEM AND HAD TAKEN FULL RESPONSIBILITY FOR THEM.

8. DIRECTOR PROMISED THAT FOREIGN MINISTRY WOULD CONTINUE TO FOLLOW SITUATION WITH APPROPRIATE SYRIAN AUTHORITIES. SUGGESTED WE ALSO KEEP IN TOUCH WITH MINISTRY OF INFORMATION.  
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9. AMBASSADOR JAN 19 WAS TWICE IN CONTACT WITH PRESIDENCY RE LUDINGTON CASE, POINTED OUT POTENTIAL EMBARRASSMENT TO SYRIAN-U.S. RELATIONS, ASKED THAT LUDINGTON BE RELEASED IMMEDIATELY OR THAT EMBASSY BE GIVEN ACCESS TO HIM ASAP. ALSO ASKED FOR ASSURANCE THERE NO MISTREATMENT. PRESIDENCY OFFICIALS STATED THEY UNAWARE OF CASE, WOULD CHECK INTO BACKGROUND AND ADVISE.

10. AT 1130 JAN 20 EMBASSY INFORMED BY MINISTRY OF  
INFORMATION LUDINGTON RELEASED APPROXIMATELY 1030 THIS  
MORNING UNDER INSTRUCTIONS TO LEAVE COUNTRY IMMEDIATELY.  
MINISTRY OF INFORMATION DIRECTOR OF FOREIGN RELATIONS  
REQUESTED MEETING WITH PAO WEDNESDAY, JAN 22, TO DISCUSS  
FULL CIRCUMSTANCES OF DETENTION.

11. EMBASSY HAS NOT YET SEEN OR HEARD FROM  
LUDINGTON AND ASSUMES HE IS PROCEEDING DIRECTLY TO BEIRUT.  
MURPHY

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## Message Attributes

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